

**Comparison of Columbia College Distance Education and the California Community College System**

Columbia College Office of Research and Planning <sup>1</sup>

May 18, 2020

There has been an increasing number of students enrolling in California Community College online courses (Table 1). <sup>2</sup> In AY2005-06 about 11.1% of California Community College students engaged in some form of distance education. By AY2013-14, 23.4% did so, or a 110.8% increase. By AY2016-17, 27.7% of students engaged in some form of distance education, an additional increase of 18.4%, and a 149.5% increase since AY2005-06. If the rate of increase from AY2016-17 were assumed to be the same as the preceding four-year interval, it is estimated that about 32.8% of students were engaged in some form of online education by AY2019-20, the most recent academic year systemwide.

**Table 1. Unduplicated Student Headcount in Distance Education and Traditional Education Course Sessions**

Academic Year	Distance Education	Traditional Education	Total	Percent of Total Headcount
AY2005-06	328,372	2,630,207	2,958,579	11.1%
AY2006-07	392,355	2,694,149	3,086,504	12.7%
AY2007-08	483,884	2,810,572	3,294,456	14.7%
AY2008-09	611,689	2,923,137	3,534,826	17.3%
AY2009-10	649,518	2,758,831	3,408,349	19.1%
AY2010-11	675,760	2,570,688	3,246,448	20.8%
AY2011-12	643,255	2,388,913	3,032,168	21.2%
AY2012-13	633,058	2,257,177	2,890,235	21.9%
AY2013-14	687,935	2,256,020	2,943,955	23.4%
AY2014-15	732,577	2,244,158	2,976,735	24.6%
AY2015-16	796,600	2,251,790	3,048,390	26.1%
AY2016-17	860,283	2,242,618	3,102,901	27.7%

Source: CCCCO 2017 Distance Education Report

Yet, online courses had already exceeded this level at Columbia College by AY2014-15, where 36.6% of regular students (i.e., excluding incarcerated and dual-enrolled high school students) enrolled in a course with any online component, and 34.0% enrolled in a fully online course (Table 2). By AY2016-17, 38.0% of Columbia College students enrolled in a course with any online component, and 37.2% enrolled in at least one fully online course. By AY2019-20, 52.8% of students enrolled in a course with any online component, an increase of 38.9% since AY2016-17, and 49.8% enrolled in a fully online course, an increase of 33.9% since AY2016-17. Perhaps not surprisingly, but still important, the rate of increase in unduplicated enrollment into distance education at Columbia College coincided with increasing online course offerings. Sections with any online components were 16.0% of all sections in AY2016-17, and

<sup>1</sup> For additional information about this report, please contact: Dr. Benjamin J. Marcus, Director of College Research and Planning, at [marcusb@yosemite.edu](mailto:marcusb@yosemite.edu), or Matthew Connot, Research Analyst, at [connotm@yosemite.edu](mailto:connotm@yosemite.edu).

<sup>2</sup> California Community College Chancellor's Office (2017). *Distance Education Report*. Accessed April 2020 from <https://www.cccco.edu/-/media/CCCCO-Website/About-Us/Reports/Files/2017-DE-Report-Final-ADA.ashx?la=en&hash=4355069E3B2E3371FBF401A0788013DD0188EE3D>.

were 24.0% in AY2019-20, or an increase of 50.0%. Fully online sections were 14.9% of offerings in AY2016-17, and were 20.0% in AY2019-20, an increase of 34.2%.

**Table 2. Columbia College Trends in Online Enrollment AY2012-13 to AY2019-20**

Unduplicated Enrollment by Headcount						
Academic Year	Total Enrollment	At Least One Course with an Online Component	Percent	At Least One Fully Online Course	Percent	
AY2012-13	4,455	1,196	26.8%	966	21.7%	
AY2013-14	4,290	1,326	30.9%	1,070	24.9%	
AY2014-15	3,915	1,434	36.6%	1,333	34.0%	
AY2015-16	3,926	1,472	37.5%	1,394	35.5%	
AY2016-17	3,835	1,459	38.0%	1,425	37.2%	
AY2017-18	3,575	1,466	41.0%	1,416	39.6%	
AY2018-19	3,444	1,622	47.1%	1,556	45.2%	
AY2019-20	3,326	1,757	52.8%	1,658	49.8%	

  

Enrollment by Sections						
Academic Year	All Section Enrollments	Any Online Component	Percent	Fully Online	Percent	
AY2012-13	17,127	1,920	11.2%	1,561	9.1%	
AY2013-14	16,942	2,233	13.2%	1,796	10.6%	
AY2014-15	16,254	2,612	16.1%	2,436	15.0%	
AY2015-16	16,378	2,847	17.4%	2,705	16.5%	
AY2016-17	15,989	2,813	17.6%	2,712	17.0%	
AY2017-18	15,176	2,837	18.7%	2,733	18.0%	
AY2018-19	15,123	3,494	23.1%	3,335	22.1%	
AY2019-20	14,759	4,105	27.8%	3,836	26.0%	

  

Section Offerings						
Academic Year	All Section Offerings	Any Online Component	Percent	Fully Online	Percent	
AY2012-13	1,014	96	9.5%	74	7.3%	
AY2013-14	1,082	135	12.5%	108	10.0%	
AY2014-15	989	154	15.6%	138	14.0%	
AY2015-16	953	158	16.6%	147	15.4%	
AY2016-17	898	144	16.0%	134	14.9%	
AY2017-18	908	135	14.9%	128	14.1%	
AY2018-19	917	193	21.0%	157	17.1%	
AY2019-20	871	209	24.0%	174	20.0%	

Notes. Excludes dual-enrolled high school students and incarcerated students. Enrollment assumes one ongoing section enrollment at term-census. Online components were determined by the Y320 Distance Ed Percentage, regardless of specific instructional method. Source. Yosemite Community College District CROA-EDS Research Database.

These outcomes suggest three critical features of Columbia College's capacity for distance education. First, it has a demonstrated legacy of online education that has exceeded statewide capacity. Second, it has been able to offer an increasing supply of distance education to accommodate demand. Third, and perhaps most critically, Columbia College students will take advantage of distance education offerings at substantial rates when such offerings are available.

Columbia College's capacity for distance education is ostensibly valuable for its local students, but also indicate potential for increased enrollments both within and beyond its boundaries. Online education has been effective for other rural community colleges. Lake Tahoe Community College, for example, generated about 70.0% of its AY2018-19 FTES through distance education, and offered five programs through the *California Virtual Campus*, which provides a marketplace for courses and programs across multiple community colleges.<sup>3, 4</sup>

Regardless, as more students engage in online education, it is also becoming more institutionally competitive. While it is likely that many California students have to this point enrolled in online courses through their local community college, recent initiatives, like the *California Virtual Campus*, will make it easier for students to shop across the state for college education.<sup>5</sup> California State Universities and California Community Colleges have even developed a collaborative initiative called *Finish Faster!* in which students at CSUs can fulfill general education requirements through CCCs using an online course finder that combines courses from both systems.<sup>6</sup> Completing general education requirements for both associate and bachelor level degrees is one of the most appealing aspects of online coursework for students, and it has been observed that there is particular demand for general education related to math and quantitative reasoning (including statistics and calculus courses), humanities, and oral communication.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> California Virtual Campus – Online Education Initiative (2020). *Online Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT)* (Webpage). Accessed April 2020 from <https://cvc.edu/adt/>

<sup>4</sup> California Community College Chancellor's Office Management Information Systems Data Mart (2020). *Distance Education (DE) Full Time Equivalent Students (FTES) Summary Report* (Webpage). Accessed April 2020 from [https://datamart.cccco.edu/Students/FTES\\_Summary\\_DE.aspx](https://datamart.cccco.edu/Students/FTES_Summary_DE.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Cal State Online (2020). *Why Take Online Transfer Courses?* (Webpage). Accessed April 2020 from <https://calstateonline.quottly.com/>

<sup>7</sup> California Virtual Campus – Online Education Initiative (2018). Consortium Meeting Minutes. Accessed April 2020 from <http://cvc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CVC-OEI-Consortium-Minutes-10.19.18.pdf>